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ABSTRACT

The wide assortment of books and seminars on assertiveness training shows a growing desire among people to learn how to express their feelings. This paper attempts to adapt many of these techniques to the foreign language classroom. Sixteen activities which enable students to practice communication are proposed. They encompass all levels of ability, and they involve all four language skills. The teacher does not become a therapist but rather a leader (and participant) in expressing ideas in the target language. It is hoped that this will make the classroom a more realistic environment and that the student will have a natural outlet for the structure he or she has acquired. (Author)

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Assertive Communication for Foreign Languages

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The ability to talk about ourselves, who we are, how we live, and the ability to make other people comfortable in talking about themselves in the same way are assertive social skills. Assertive behavior, then, is much more than demanding your rights from other people.... In this social sense, being assertive is communicating to another person what you are, what you do, what you want, what you expect of life.

Manuel J. Smith,
When I Say No, I Feel Guilty

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Assertive Communication for Foreign Languages

You have, no doubt, read the abstract of my presentation in the program and are aware that I am planning to adapt assertiveness training techniques to the foreign language classroom. Many of you may be wondering why I bothered. After all, being assertive is usually associated with telling people what you think of them, and students have been telling and showing us what they think of foreign languages for years. The truth, however, lies on a deeper level and requires a better understanding of assertiveness training.

One reason that this training is not understood is that many people have an immediate negative reaction to it. It conjures up ideas of being pushy, being consumer-oriented and anti-business, of arguments and unpleasantness, and worst of all, liberated women. While each of these things can be involved in assertiveness training, the reality is of a much broader scope. To see how this can apply to our profession, let's examine some of the published work in the field.

I first realized the possibilities for this presentation while reading a book called Creative Aggression by Bach and Goldberg. Their thesis is that anger is a perfectly natural emotion which has been repressed as unacceptable by our society. This void leads to ineffectual relationships and often to psychological problems. This ineffectiveness parallels the foreign language classroom where we eliminate these feelings by not providing activities for this type of communication and also not providing the ability to communicate in terms of vocabulary. The student can "hate," "not like," and "be sick," but not much else. Inability to communicate is the common denominator among the various approaches to assertiveness

training. Fensterheim and Baer define the assertive person as one who "can communicate with people on all levels. . . . This communication is always open, direct, honest, and appropriate."[1] This obviously is a goal toward which we should be striving in our teaching. The main problem is to see if this training can be adapted informally to the classroom.

Most psychologists who are proponents of these techniques are behaviorists. In this school it is believed that any given behavior is learned, and therefore unwanted behavior can be unlearned. While others may delve into the subsconscious to find out why a person is neurotic, behaviorists simply try to change the symptoms. In changing them, they change the person. It is this theory that permits an adaptation of assertiveness training techniques to the classroom. The proponents of the theory do not attempt to psychoanalyze their subjects; they simply try to practice the desired behavior so that the subjects can learn it. Several psychologists have developed activities in which unassertive people "practice communication." Since these exercises have been described in self-help-type books available in paperback at any store, they are easily adaptable to the foreign language classroom.

Before I describe the activities I have adapted, we should perhaps discuss possible reservations to the idea. One might ask how we can engage in some form of therapy, especially when the teacher has no training. The answer is that each activity has been designed with a "way out" for the student who does not want to express a personal feeling. In each activity there is room for personal and general statements. Furthermore, some of the activities practice other aspects of communication, such as listening.

Another reservation you may have is that we should not be encouraging students to complain, to attack the status quo. Alberti and Emmons react

to this idea in the following way:

> Teachers are especially guilty of anti-assertive behavior. Quiet, well-behaved children who do not question the system are rewarded, whereas those who buck the system in some way are dealt with sternly. It is an acknowledged conclusion among educators that the child's natural spontaneity in learning is "conditioned out" no later than the fourth or fifth grade."[2]

It is wrong to assume that we are encouraging rebellion by investigating personal feelings. Bessell and Palomares note that students have always engaged in "inarticulate rebellion, sabotage, and subtle refusal to cooperate."[3] The activities I am proposing will not worsen this situation. They may, however, bring problems to light and allow for discussion in a more supportive atmosphere.

Handout

Selected Bibliography

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II. Assertiveness Training for Everyone

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III. Assertiveness Training for Women

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Seattle-King County Now. Woman, Assert Your Self! New York: Harper and Row, 1977. (Perennial, $1.50)

Taubman, Bryna. How to Become an Assertive Woman. New York: Pocket Books, 1976. ($1.95)

Activity/Level	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Elementary				
Feedback	X	X		
Fogging	X	X		
Attraction-Reservation		X		X
Situation Model		X		X
Slave Market	X	X		
Vesuvius		X		X
Insult Clubs	X	X	X	X
Myself			X	X
Intermediate				
Sensitivity Session	X	X	X	X
Negative Inquiry				X
Accepting Compliments	X	X		
Put-Down, Retort		X		X
Expectation Exercise			X	X
Advanced				
Goals				X
Reactions to Stress			X	X
Role Playing	X	X		

Elementary Activities

1. Feedback (© Bach and Goldberg, 1974)

To train people to listen to others' feelings, this activity forces them to repeat each message they hear. The student does not repeat word for word but rather the idea.

Model (teacher or student):	Response:
I'm having a good time.	You're having a good time.
I hate Monday.	You hate Monday.
You smoke too much.	I smoke too much.

Alternate statements to be "fed back" with questions to be answered. It drills subjects and verbs and recognition of intonation contours.

Have each student give a like or dislike concerning vocabulary being studied (food, clothes, etc.) with each student repeating all previous responses:

I don't like green beans. Sally doesn't like spinach. Bill doesn't like onions, etc.

2. Fogging (© Smith, 1975)

One agrees with another person no matter what the complaint simply to tire him out.

Model:	Response:
It's raining.	It rains a lot in the spring.
You don't study.	I don't study all the time.
X is a terrible president.	X makes mistakes.
X is a dull city.	Stores are often closed.
Farrah Faucett is a great actress.	She is amusing.
I am a great teacher.	You do some good things.

3. Attraction-Reservation (© Bach and Goldberg, 1974)

To develop a relationship people must express their likes and dislikes about others.

Model provides subject:	Response:
School	Too much work.
	History is dull.
	I hate the principal.
Dormitories	They are too noisy.
	My roommate snores.
	The food is awful.
	My room is hot.

Family, the hometown, television, etc.

4. Situation Model (Christensen, FLA, 8:219)
Your reaction to an unpleasant situation.

Model:	Response:
Do you want to go out Saturday?	I'm washing my hair.
Where is your composition for today?	My dog ate it.
We have a big test tomorrow.	I'm going to be sick.
Give me your money or your life!	Will you take a check?

5. Slave Market (© Bach and Goldberg, 1974)
Have students give commands for others to act out in order to break domineering relationships.

Go to the board and write your name.
Take off your shoe.
Dance with Mary.
Tell me your phone number.
Touch your nose.
Sing the Marseillaise.

6. Vesuvius (© Bach and Goldberg, 1974)
Students release hostility by talking about everything that is going wrong in their lives.

Activities: Sentence builders:

My school		he	make too many rules
My parents			borrow my clothes
My teacher	make(s) me mad when	she	give too much work
My roommate		they	?

or Sentence Completions:

I get mad when . . .
I'm fed up when . . .
I'm happiest when . . .
I've had it up to here (plus appropriate gesture) when . . .

7. Insult Clubs (© Bach and Goldberg, 1974)
Students talk or write about their stereotyped perceptions of groups they know.

Sentence Completions:
Boys/Girls always want to . . .
Athletes are all . . .
Fraternity/Sorority people have . . .
Teachers always . . .
The police can't . . .

Students write reactions and exchange papers for rebuttal.

8. Myself (©Seattle-King County Now, 1976)
To combat a poor self-image students list all their good qualities.

A values questionnaire elicits students greatest achievement, what they are proud of, what new thing they would like to try, etc.

Intermediate Activities

1. "Sensitivity Session" (Morgenstern, MLJ 60:36; Fensterheim and Baer, 1975)
Students say two things they like and two things they dislike about people they know. Dislikes are always expressed in a positive way.

Activity 1: Practice changing general negative comments to positive ones.

Negative:	Positive:
You correct too much.	I like it when you don't correct.
You interrupt me all the time.	I want to finish what I have to say.
We always do what you want to.	I like to choose an activity.
You never let us talk.	I like the class when we have free conversation.
You're too shy.	I like to hear your opinons.

Activity 2:

The preceding activity is put into practice with students in the class. Great care must be taken if people present are described.

2. "Negative Inquiry" (©Smith, 1975)
This involves follow up questions to vague criticism.

Model:
You talk too much in class.
Student Questions:
When do I talk too much?
To whom do I talk?
Do I answer too many questions?
Do you think I miss important things?
Am I disturbing other students?

3. Accepting Compliments (©Baer, 1976)
Unassertive people have trouble accepting compliments. Students practice giving positive reactions to compliments.

Compliment:	Reaction:
You're pretty/handsome today.	I'm in a very good mood.
You are well prepared today.	I studied a lot last night.
You have nice clothes.	I'm glad you like them.
You have a nice personality.	You're fun to be with.

4. Put-Down, Retort (© Baer, 1976)
For fun students think of replies to unkind remarks.

Why can't you be like your brother/sister?
When will you ever learn?
Can't you do anything right?
Don't you ever listen?
Can't you do any better than that?

5. Expectation Exercise (© Bach and Goldberg, 1974)
To develop a meaningful relationship people must state what they expect of each other.

Activity: Students write down what they expect of the teacher and their classmates and what they think the teacher expects of them.

Activity: Students and teachers exchange lists and react to them.

Advanced Activities

1. Goals (© Fensterheim and Baer, 1975)
Unassertive people often have no direction in their lives. Establishing concrete goals for the immediate future and the longer term helps.

Activity: Students write down goals for the immediate future (24 hours, three days, or one week). They state exactly what they must do to accomplish this.

Activity: The same activity is done for longer range goals (one year, five years, or life).

Activity: Students describe their idealized self-image. They should list the qualities they have which will permit them to work toward this idealized person.

2. Reactions to stress situations (© Alberti and Emmons, 1975)
One can practice reactions to unpleasant situations by describing what the non-assertive, aggressive, and assertive behavior would be.

Activity: Students react to being given too much work, being short-changed in a store, returning a broken product, being given poor treatment in a health clinic. They write two reactions which are unassertive and aggressive and therefore humorous. The assertive reaction is reasonable and hopefully productive.

Activity: Students each invent a stress situation, exchange them and write reactions.

Activity: Students act out prepared or extemporaneous dialogues showing the various reactions.

3. Role playing

In order to cope with certain situations, the subject must play the role of being manipulated by another. Often the roles are switched. Practicing these confrontations should make the real-life situations easier to handle.

Activity: Teacher creates a situation with a manipulator and a person trying to be assertive. The results are more interesting if the more linguistically advanced students are the manipulators. Roles can be reversed, even without warning.

Activity: Students invent or describe real situations they have confronted.

Examples:
A bad meal in a restaurant with a surly waiter (waitress).
Trying to return a defective purchase (e.g. a used car).
Unreasonable demand by a person in authority (parent, teacher, policeman).
Being asked for help in cheating on a paper or test.
Dealing with a persistent salesman.

Concluding remarks

In addition to the stress on communication in assertiveness training, you will note that several techniques are designed to improve one's self-image. Since there is a correlation between a self-esteem and language ability,[4] these activities can be even that much more beneficial. For years language teachers have been looking for ideas to offer students which other curricula cannot. I submit to you that humanistic or affective education, of which this presentation is a small part, is just such an area. In other subjects such as English and the social sciences, teachers have been abandoning the basics in order to explore students' feelings. Foreign language is the only curriculum which can combine the cognitive and affective domains and explore both (often at the same time) without neglecting one to the detriment of the other. The sixteen activities I have proposed can contribute to a healthy learning environment. Alberti and Emmons write:

> Learning to be assertive is education for living, for being human, for becoming ourselves, in much more human ways, and for making society more human too.[5]

As quoted on the cover of your handout, Manuel Smith states

(HO)

I started this presentation by saying that students have always said what they think of us. Perhaps now when they tell us, they will say it openly and in the foreign language.

QUESTIONS

FOOTNOTES

[1] Herbert Fensterheim and Jean Baer, Don't Say Yes When You Want to Say No (New York: Dell, 1975), p. 20.

[2] Robert E. Alberti and Michael L. Emmons, Stand Up, Speak Out, Talk Back! (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), p. 17.

[3] Quoted in Renée S. Disick and Laura Barbanel, "Affective Education and Foreign Languages," in Gilbert A. Jarvis, ed., The Challenge of Communication, The ACTFL Review of Foreign Language Education, vol. 6 (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co., 1974), p. 215.

[4] Beverly Galyean,"Humanistic Education: A Mosaic Just Begun, " in Gilbert A. Jarvis, ed., An Integrative Approach to Foreign Language Teaching: Choosing Among the Options, The ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series, vol. 8 (Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co., 1976), p. 237.

[5] Manuel J. Smith, When I Say No, I Feel Guilty (New York: The Press, 1975), p. 16.